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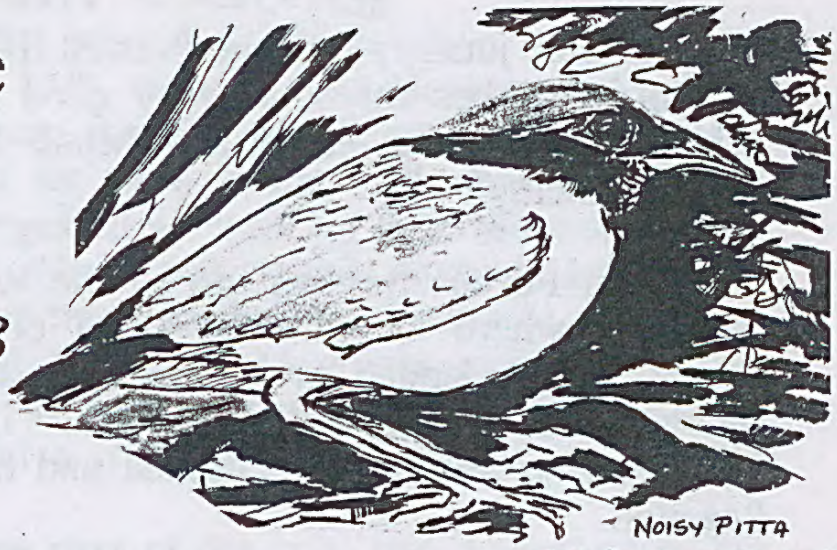

NOISY PITTA
— SEE 'a WINTER ESCAPE'

PLANTS OF MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE

Common Hovea
(Hovea heterophylla)

HOVEA HETEROPHYLLA

Growing to a height of no more than 30cms this wirey stemmed little semi-shrub is one of the first of the blue flowers, appearing before the end of winter until early spring. The one in the illustration was found in full flower on Aug. 20.

The flowers are lilac rather than blue, and the keel is darker than the standards, which have a tracery of darker veins, and are yellowish at the base with darker markings at the edge of ithe yellow.

The leaves at the base of the plant are oval, but higher up the plant they are narrow linear, and flat, usually sparsely hairy (pubescent) underneath with a prominent mid-vein, which shows on the top of the leaf as a furrow for the length of the leaf.

Elsewhere they are also known as Blue-bonnets and Birds-eyes, but Common Hovea is the only name I know of used in this district.

Rita Mills

a Winter Escape

This July Maureen and I took the Annual "Hols" and headed north for four weeks to try and escape the winter chills and check out some of the NSW and Queensland birding spots. Happily I can report that both ventures were successful.

On our journey up the Newell Highway we stopped off at Gum Swamp at Forbes for some very good duck sightings, including Plumed Whistle Duck, Pink-eared and Musk Ducks and Australian Shoveller, among others

From Forbes we went on to the Warrumbungle National Park for a few days where we saw the "Bird of the Trip", a pair of Turquoise Parrots which landed in a dead tree about 30 metres from us before flying to the ground below to feed. In the "Bungles" we also spotted King Parrots and Spiney-cheeked and Striped Honeyeaters, but alas, no Regents.

We then headed east to the Dorrigo area and Dorrigo National Park for some more wonderful sightings in and around the rainforest, including Noisy Pitta, Green Catbird, Yellow-throated and Large-billed Scrubwrens, Brown Cuckoo-dove, Logrunner, Satin Bowerbird and White-headed Pigeon.

We then travelled north to the lovely little town of Iluka on the mighty Clarence River, just north of Shirley Parnaby's "Paradise" - "Wooli on the Yuragir" (Castlemaine Naturalist, July '98), with a similar variety of birds. Iluka is notable for its littoral rainforest right on the coast. This area rewarded us with wonderful sightings, such as Regent Bower-bird, Spangled Drongo, Bar-shouldered Dove, White-headed (Varied) Sitella, Figbird, Pheasant Coucal, Latham's Snipe, Rufous Fantail, and Rose Robin, and many hours of peaceful strolling in the rainforest.

Next stop was a week in Brisbane where the Boondall Wetlands is a visiting must. A short circular route takes in a variety of habitats with a bird list of 220 species. Some of our favourites were - Red-backed and Variagated Fairy-wrens, Scarlet Honeyeater, Chestnut-breasted Mannikin, Mangrove Gerigone, Collared Kingfisher, White-throated Honeyeater, and Eastern Reef Egret.

Another fine wetland in the northern suburbs of Brisbane is the Tinch Tamba Reserve on the South Pine River. Here we found Spotted Harrier, Pacific Baza, Mangrove Bittern and Glossy Ibis.

Our last few days were in the Coolum-Noosa area where we saw Double-barred Finches and Varied Triller.

The weather for the trip was mainly fine, but always warm. I think another winter trip north will be inevitable.

Ken, and Maureen, Dredge.

Trentham Outing

Those of us (about 13 or 14) who decided to brave the cold and venture down to Trentham on 15/8 to visit the Geological Museum belonging to Dr Julian Collis, our speaker for the meeting the night before, didn't dream of the treat we were in for. We met at the Post Office as arranged, and Julian suggested we walk up Blue Mountain. Had anyone heard of Blue Mountain? No, I don't think anybody had, but a short drive due south and into the bush tracks, and a hike to the top of the ancient volcano made us feel that Blue Mountain must be one of Trentham's best kept secrets. I wonder how many of us have been to Trentham and never dreamed what a treasure it has about 5kms south?

Julian allowed an hour for this part of the trip, but it took us an 1½ hours to get back to the cars. I was trailing behind with Frank, and just caught up on a couple of occasions when the group stopped for Julian to collect some rock samples. There weren't many birds, but quite a few plants were coming into flower. As we rose above the surrounding country we got some magnificent views to the north and east, and some of the old trees on the side of the mountain were really beautiful. Further up we found that we were above a property down in the valley, and suddenly, near the top, there was what seemed to be a weekender, then a little old cemetary. Finally we reached the top. Julian was filling a bag with the damp soil and loading that in his backpack with the rocks to carry all the way down again! He was collecting both for his study to determine the age of the cone and the depth the flow came from. Some of the group were taking the opportunity to admire the views, including some intrepid souls who decided to climb up the fire-tower!

We walked down on the other track and we soon realised that farmland was really not far away, and not only farmland, but a village, which Julian explained had never actually been occupied and was virtually a ghost town. Somebody smarter that I am realised it was the set for "The Man from Snowy River".

We walked back to the cars and then drove to the Museum where we had a cuppa - a real bring-and-share affair. The set-out of the museum and the wonderful range of specimens, and a chance to look at sand-grains of gemstones under a microscope, could have kept many of us there for the rest of the afternoon, but Julian wanted to show us Trentham Falls before it was dark. He explained the geology and geological history of the area and pointed out a section of columns which is likely to fall, thousands of tonnes of it, at any time. He doesn't recommend walking in under the falls!

A few walked right down to the river, but some of us decided that it was a long way back up again, so we waited and just admired the

magnificent Manna Gums and Peppermints, as well as enjoying the cool, sweet air of a fresh, fine winters' evening. Julian suggested that there might just be enough light to see some of the gemstones that we just might be able to find at Lyonville Springs, but we all decided that it might be better to leave that for another day.

The area was beautiful and interesting, made more so by a man who is not only intensly interested in and knowlegable about his subject, but also capable of passing on that knowledge in an inspiring way. I'm looking forward to another trip down to Trentham sometime.

Rita Mills

BABBLINGS FROM BARKERS CREEK, #10

Travelling North

This year, for a change, Jacqui and I decided to travel to Mackay, via the coast, for our annual leave. We started at Metung and wandered our way to Mackay, visiting our children, grandson, friends and old work mates on the way, before turning inland to gradually work our way south,.

We had not visited Metung and Mallacoota before as, like many others, we had stayed on the Highway and dashed past for more "exotic places", like Merrimbula, Bermagui, etc. However, this time we had more sense, and found two delightful areas. Mallacoota and its surrounding forest boasts that it has one third of Australias's bird species.

When we were there cormorants were at record numbers as were the Pelicans. Apparantly during dry seasons inland both species head for the Australian coastline in order to supplement their food requirements, much to the annoyance of the amateur fishermen. We were told that a cormorant eats four times its body weight each day. Early in the morning we could see flocks of several hundred heading down the coast to their feeding grounds. Even though all the fishermen were complaining we noticed that they continued to clean their fish at the water's edge, much to the delight of the water birds.

When the Pelicans come into land on the water they remind me of slow flying seaplanes, a Catalina for example: so graceful and totally under control.

We also called in to see a friend on the Queensland Sunshine Coast who manages a block of units right on the beach. He took me down to their jetty to study the views and the bird life. There, sitting on the edge of the jetty, was a dejected looking cormorant. On closer inspection I noticed it had a length of nylon fishing line hanging from its

bill. Once the cormorant dived into the water to seek a meal its length of line slowed down its swinmming speed to such an extent that it was unable to catch sufficient food to maintain its health.

So, I decided to catch it and attempt to remove the fishing line. My initial attempts were useless, but I noticed that a lad who was fishing before my arrival but had now been caught up in my antics had some "hardheads" he was using for bait, so I then attempted to lure the cormorant with this small fish. The bird approached, stood back and studied the situation and then moved in. A quick hard strike with its hooked bill to the knuckle of one of my fingers and the fish was gone. Round three to the cormorant. Back to the fisherman for another "hardhead". This time I decided to ignore the hooked beak and my left hand and focus exclusively on the bird's neck, with my right hand poised for swift action.

Another stand-off, but the cormorant's stomach was still speaking. He dashed and I grabbed. He lost and I won, but to my horror I realized that there was a hook attached to the other end of the fishing line so there was little I could do for him.

The last I saw of my cormorant he was wrapped up in an old towel and was being taken off by a kindly local to see a vet.

John Turnbull

Observations

*Margaret Dunn has a Silky Hakea in her yard which has had seven nests, now slowly disintergrating, in it. The birds have made a good choice as the prickles on Silky Hakea make it a good fortress against cats and other predators.

* Phee Broadway had two Wood Ducks investigating one of the chimneys on the house. She wondered whether they might be considering it as a nesting site, but they flew off next door to investigate their chimney, too.

* North west of Castlemaine Natalie de Macchus has found the first greenhood in flower, Pterostylus nana, on her property. There are also several in bud. P. curta and P. cyanocephala (or P. mutica?) are also in bud. Three patches of greenhoods which have not flowered since they were first discovered three years ago appear not to be flowering again this year. The suggestion was made that Natalie try lighting a small fire over one of the clumps and see if that induces flowering.

* Natalie has also had a pair of Wood Ducks foraging in the front garden. This is a first - the garden is in the bush, not out in the open.

* Two Wood Ducks were seen by Ern Perkins in Barker Street opposite the Foundry Band Room.

* Ken Cross reported that they heard a terrible thump and then a scraping on their roof one day recently. They went outside to see a Little Pied Cormorant scrabbling on the iron roof. Apparantly the bird had mistaken the shiny roof for a pond!

* The speaker for the night , Dr Julian Hollis, told of snow at Trentham this year, including one heavy fall. The night before the Sulphur-crested Cockatoos came into their usual roost to take off, heading north each time, with much agitation. Later the snow started to fall, and on the last occasion so did some of the branches of the cockatoos' usual roost trees! Julian has decided that he now knows how to predict snow.

* Margaret Hunter has been making enquiries as to why they have such a large Tiger Snake population at their house. In her enquiries she has discovered that the Mt

Alexander population is much sought after (illegally) by herpertologists, as the colouring is unusually bright - footy colours Margaret calls it!

*Margaret also had the Mount Alexander Wedgetails at the house. They had been perched in a tree nearby, only about 3 metres up, flew across past within a few feet of her, and then perched again only about 3 or 4 metres up on a branch of another tree only a very short distance away in the paddock. She is wondering if they might be considering nesting, because, if they do, there are plenty of young rabbits in the area.

* George Broadway recently visited Hilltop Rose Nursery at Guildford, where the owner, Ian Huxley, told him that there have been Cresent Honeyeaters in the Garden. Lesley Perkins had been told that 6 weeks before one had been reported in Kalimna Park.

* From Frank Carpenter, who lives in Fryers Road Chewton. "I have a female Pink Robin, Petroica rodinogaster, visiting my garden. It was here today (13/8), quite tame, and I was only about 2 metres from it. It flew to the shed window to catch a spider. I have had a Yellow Robin do the same thing previously.

"I have looked up 3 bird books to identify it and now I'm certrain I've got it right. It is plain brown, lighter below and has what I call an orange zig-zag bar on its wing. The books say 'rich buff or light brown', but I would say 'orange'. There are no other markings. It is smaller than a Scarlet Robin. It has been here on about six occasions.

"I, too, saw the flock of corellas about the end of June. I was in the car park at the Botanic Gardens, opposite the Foundry, and heard them before I saw them. I would say 300 to 400, maybe 500. They were flying, my guess would be, 500 and 100 feet up. In the evening sunlight they appeared buff coloured. If they had spent the day pulling onion grass they would not be perfect white. They were not Galahs."

* On the afternoon of Monday Aug. 24 Bob Willmer arrived at our back door with a dead Tuan mother with five naked young, each only about 12 mm long attached to her teats. There had been six but one had fallen off when he picked her up. He'd found her dead on the ground in the bush paddock next door to his place when he had been pulling weeds. She didn't appear to be injured in any way, and hadn't started to decay at all. There'd been a frost the night before, and I wondered if the frost, not enough feed and 6 young were just too much for her? Rita Mills.

* Also from Blakeley Road; 28/8, the first fledgling Magpie seen for the season. Rita Mills

* Gower School sightings, 23/8, 12.10pm - 12.50pm. Fuscous Honeyeater - nest building observed - cup nest high in eucalypt; appeared to be gathering material from the ground. Eastern Rosella - two near hole in eucalypt, but not seen entering. Noisy Miner, Galah, Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, Australian Raven. Brown-headed Honeyeater - my first sighting for area - observed being mobbed by three Fuscous Honeyeaters. Red Wattlebird - nest building observed; nest a medium sized twiggy affair about 6 metres above the ground in the fork of a small branch. Brown Treecreeper, Purple-crowned Lorrikeet - a first-ever sighting, Willie Wagtail, Long-billed Corella - first time seen by me in the area. Phillip West

* A male Mistletoe Bird seen at the corner of Hunter and Kennedy Sts., and first Olive-backed Oriole for the season heard near the Red, White and Blue mine. Maureen and Ken Dredge.

* "Recently at the Boondall Wetlands in Brisbane the Park Ranger showed us to an Osprey nest (huge) with young. Our timing was perfect. As we observed, an adult arrived back at the nest with a fish grasped in its talons and disappeared into the depths. After observing an occasional head appearing above the rim of the nest, out came a fish skeleton over the side. For those interested, an Osprey lunch lasts approximately 4 minutes!" Maureen and Ken Dredge

* Two Rainbow Lorikeets seen in a garden at Maldon by Clare Warn at the end of August.

BIRD ATLASSING see CN, #247 (August) The local co-ordinator of the Bird Atlas Survey is Margaret Badminton. If you wish to take part please contact Margaret on 5473 4555.

SMITHS REEF WALK

Saturday Oct 3 - walk in Smiths Reef Forest with Maldon Landcare. Meet on Railway Track, Maldon (opposite Tip Road entrance)at 1.30pm. Take afternoon tea.

GREAT DIVIDING TRAIL

Next public Walk Sat Oct 3, starting 9am, (Don't forget to vote!), St. Erth to O'Briens Crossing. Meet at the Garden of St Erth, Blackwood. 5-6 hours, rated medium. Leader Neville Frazer.

IT IS ESSENTIAL that you contact the leader or Ed Butler (5348 3059) at least 4 days before the walk to book in and arrange car shuffle, etc. Suitable footwear, clothing, and drinks, snacks and lunch essential. The walk organisers now reserve the right to refuse participation to anyone who is ill equipped.

Also, after the Get-together -

MICROCOSMOS 'FLIES' AGAIN

For those who missed out last year there is another chance to view *Microcosmos* at the Bendigo Cinema as part of the "Spring in the Bendigo Bush" program. The screening is on Sunday 13th September at 4 pm.

This 74 minute film follows one day in the insect world in a field in France. You will see superb close-up filming of ants, beetles, snails, butterflies and ladybirds going about their daily business, with natural sounds and, at times, a music score, but no narrative. It is a wonderful film to experience on the large screen.

I am hoping that *Microcosmos* will inspire similar projects about our local ecosystems.

"It turns a grassland into a rainforest" said a friend who saw it last year, meaning that you really do see things from the insects' perspective.

Tickets will be available from me at the meeting on 11th September.

Cost is only $6 per person.

Frances Cincotta
phone 54762691

or, the next weekend-

BENDIGO - HEART OF THE BOX-IRONBARK COUNTRY

WILDFLOWER SHOW

PRESENTED BY THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB & BENDIGO NATIVE PLANT GROUP AS PART OF THE "SPRING IN THE BENDIGO BUSH" PROGRAM

ENTRY BY GOLD COIN DONATION

SENIOR CITIZENS CLUB ROOMS OLD HIGH ST. GOLDEN SQUARE

10 am - 4pm

19 & 20 SEPTEMBER

WILDFLOWER SHOW TO BE OPENED BY LOCAL GARDENING EDITOR / RADIO PRESENTER:

ROSEMARY DAVIES

11am SATURDAY
19 SEPTEMBER 1998

COME & DISCOVER OUR BEAUTIFUL NATIVE FLORA

- ADVICE & INFORMATION
- INDIGENOUS GARDEN
- FLOWER DISPLAY
- GUIDED WALK 2pm - 3pm SATURDAY (FROM SHOW)

ALSO

LOOK OUT FOR OTHER "SPRING IN THE BENDIGO BUSH" ACTIVITIES IN SEPTEMBER

ENQUIRIES
phone Elaine (03) 54 479 787
or Lorraine (03) 54 496 523

Frances will have leaflets of the full Spring in the Bendigo Bush programme at the Sept. meeting or they can be obtained from the Tourist Office or Castlemaine Library.

ANGAIR Inc. (A0002974) WILDFLOWER SHOW ANGLESEA 19th and 20th SEPTEMBER

Anglesea Hall, McMillan St. 10am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday

Families $10, Adults $4, Pensioners and Students $2, children under 12 free. Features local wildflower display, native garden plants, wildflower walks, bus trips to see wildflowers, terrestial orchid presentation, environmental display, Audio-visual presentation, art show. Art, crafts, books, cards, refreshments for sale.

For further information phone 52362787, 52632170 or 52633327.

C.F.N.C. PROGRAMME

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Art Gallery and beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street.

Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days.

Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

* *

Fri 11 to Sun. 13 Sept. **Field Naturalists Get-together at Castlemaine.**

Fri 11 **Insect Protection Mechanisms** Speaker, John Landy. UCA hall 8pm

EXCURSIONS-all leave from Rose Garden Carpark, (except Dawn Breakfast)

Saturday 12 -

9.30am

Full Day Birdwatching, Muckleford and Smiths Reef, leaders Ken and Maureen Dredge

Walk to Cobblers Gully and the Monk via Eureka, 14km, Leaders Ern and Leslie Perkins

Half Day Vaughan and Glenluce, leader Margaret Badminton.

Fryerstown, Leader Stan Bruton.

Fryers Ridge, leader George Broadway

1.30pm Wattle Flat bush, leader Rita Mills

North British Mine, Maldon, leader Kay Turner.

7.30pm UCA hall. Excursion **reports and observations**, and

8.15pm **Why Botanists Change Names**, Speaker Dr Tim Entwisle.

Sunday 13 -

6.00am Dawn Breakfast at Kalimna Point. Meet at Kalimna Point.

9.30am Geological Features, leaders Ern and Leslie Perkins.

Mount Alexander West Ridge Track, leader Margaret Hunter.

Fryerstown, leader Frank Duffin.

The Monk and Eureka, leader Chris Morris.

Thur 24 Sept. **Broom Pull** at the Butterfly area of the Botanical Gardens, Froomes Rd. Start 9 am. Bring gardening gloves, something to kneel on, a friend or two, snacks and drinks. Finish about 2.30 - 3.00pm. A free barbecue to follow.

Fri Oct 9 **Spiders.** Speaker is Jenny Shield. UCA Hall 8pm.

Fri. 16 to Sun 18 Oct. **V.F.N.C.A. Campout at Warnambool.** For details see CN #244 p7.

Fri. Nov. 13 **Heaths.** Speaker is Hillary Weatherhead. UCA hall 8pm.

Sat Nov 14. **Terrick Terrick.** All day outing. The day will include a guided tour of the adjoinig native grasslands arranged by Shirley Diez of DNRE.

Fri Dec 9 **Members and Visitors Night.** Your night to contribute!

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Committee; G. Broadway (Pres.), M. Dredge (V.P.), B. Maund (Sec.), M. Badminton (Treas.), R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), J. Turnbull, M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, E. Perkins.

Subscriptions - Ordinary membership: Single $16, Family $24

Pensioner/student: Single $12, Family $18 Supporting : $25

Newsletter posted: Membership + $6

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine. 3450.
Incorporation Nº A3010